



# Murder Accountability Project®

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## Unsolved Female Strangulations in Chicago

**Summary: A cluster of 51 unsolved strangulation homicides of Chicago women have characteristics suggestive of serial murder. They were identified by a computer algorithm known to detect serial killings. Case analyses show unnatural patterns of body recovery sites that were overwhelmingly out-of-doors in crimes with clearly sexual aspects, often involving sex workers or illegal drug users.**

The Murder Accountability Project, a small nonprofit organization based in Alexandria, Virginia, has assembled the nation's most complete accounting of unsolved homicides using the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report (SHR) and augmenting these data with more than 27,000 homicides obtained from police departments that do not participate in voluntary crime reporting to the federal government. MAP has also developed a computer algorithm which has detected previously unknown serial homicides. That algorithm (available at the "Murder Clusters" tab at our Website at [www.murderdata.org](http://www.murderdata.org)) has signaled a warning about a possible series of murders in Chicago for several years.

The algorithm works by taking MAP's current database of 769,753 homicide case reports and aggregating them into more than 10,000 groups according to geographic location, victim sex and method of killing. The algorithm calculates the apparent clearance rate (the rate at which offender characteristics like sex, age and race was reported to the SHR) then looks for large clusters of homicides that had unnaturally low clearance rates. One of the nation's largest suspicious clusters of homicides observed in the last 19 years occurs in Chicago.

MAP's algorithm is available for download at the "Data & Docs" tab at the group's website. All of the data used in this analysis have also been made available to police and the general public for download at no cost. MAP seeks to assist law enforcement and the general public by widely disseminating homicide data and new techniques to analyze this information. These data are provided at no cost.

The algorithm first drew national attention in 2014 with the arrest of serial killer Darren Deon Vann in Gary, Indiana. The algorithm in 2010 had indicated a possible serial killer active in the greater Gary area when it identified 15 unsolved strangulations of women committed from 1991 through 2007. The Lake County Coroner's Office agreed that the pattern looked suspicious and opened an investigation in 2010. But Gary Police refused to discuss the possibility of an active serial killer in their community, declining to respond to registered letters sent to the city's mayor

and police chief. Vann was arrested in 2014 by police in neighboring Hammond, Indiana, and quickly confessed that he'd been active since the 1990s. Vann took police into Gary where the bodies of six previously unknown strangulation victims were recovered.

The current series of unsolved strangulations and asphyxiations in Chicago appear very similar to Gary's series, although Chicago's cluster is three times larger.

The Chicago pattern identified by MAP's algorithm can be understood when the clearance rate of female murders is calculated according to the weapon used. The following chart is based on data the Chicago Police Department reported to the FBI's Supplemental Homicide Report from 2001 through 2017:

#### **CLEARANCE RATE by METHOD OF KILLING**

<u>WEAPON</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Cleared</u>	<u>Percent</u>
<b>Strangulations or Asphyxiations</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27.9%</b>
Knife or cutting instrument	185	150	81.1%
Blunt object - hammer, club, etc	51	32	62.7%
Firearms, all types	478	248	51.9%
Personal weapons, includes beating	106	85	80.2%
Fire	10	6	60.0%
Drowning	1	1	100.0%
Other or type unknown weapons	120	76	63.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,012</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>60.8%</b>

Chicago Police are solving most female homicides, identifying the offenders about 61 percent of the time. This is a much higher clearance rate than the city experiences overall and reflects national norms. Murders of women are much more likely to be cleared through arrest than are murders of men because female homicides often are committed by intimates – boyfriends, husbands, other relatives or close acquaintances.

But the clearance rate of strangulation and asphyxiation killings are in stark contrast to all other homicides in Chicago. Only about a quarter of these have resulted in the identification of offenders. The failure-to-solve rate for strangulations in Chicago are in stark contrast to national norms. During the period from 2001 through 2017, offenders were identified 77 percent of the time in cases of strangulation or asphyxiation nationally. Put another way, Chicago accounts for only 0.8 percent of the nation's population but has reported 7.7 percent of the nation's unsolved strangulations and asphyxiations.

MAP's policy is not to make a public declaration of possible serial homicide without first conducting a review of cases identified by the algorithm. It is necessary to identify victim's names and crime narratives of suspected cases and to check for similar cases that have gone unreported to the FBI. MAP has followed this procedure three times in recent years, participating with journalists from the *Chicago Tribune*, HBO's VICE News and CBS affiliate WBBM-TV

(Channel 2). Journalists obtained case information from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, confirming the cause of death as being asphyxiation or strangulation and confirming with police that the cases remain uncleared.

In all three cases, journalists were comfortable publicly asking the question: Does Chicago Have A Serial Killer? The Murder Accountability Project has been comfortable publicly stating that Chicago's female strangulations have an elevated probability of containing serial killings. We believe police should review these cases on the assumption that the victims may have one-or-more common offenders.

In the most recent review conducted by WBBM, reporters and MAP assembled a list of 51 unsolved female strangulations whose case status was confirmed by Chicago Police. There are several unusual anomalies in these cases that are highly suggestive of serial murder:

1. About 94 percent of these victims were recovered out-of-doors or in abandoned buildings, a highly unusual pattern for strangulation killings when compared to similar murders nationwide. Asphyxia and strangulation killings often are committed by close associates of the victims and frequently are committed indoors in crimes of passion, according to national SHR data. But these out-of-door recovery sites suggest crimes committed by strangers or offenders not closely associated to victims.
2. At least three-quarters of these homicides showed clear sexual components. Most victims were found partially disrobed, completely nude, or with clothing ripped to reveal the female body. Victims frequently showed signs of possible recent sexual activity. MAP believes unusual concentrations of sexual homicides with extremely low clearance rates are an important indicator of serial murder.
3. Authorities (police and medical examiner) reported many victims had histories of prostitution, illegal drug use, or both. This type of victim is historically recognized as frequent or preferred targets of serial murder.
4. Some of the cases seem serial on their face. Theresa Bunn was found November 13, 2007 partially clothed and strangled in a burning trash can near the southwest corner of Washington Park. Hazel Marion Lewis was found November 14, 2007 in a burning trash can near the northeast corner of Washington Park. At least seven unsolved female strangulations were located near Washington Park, with two adjoining the park.
5. Body recovery sites were similar. At least seven were recovered in trash receptacles, nine near abandoned buildings, 14 in alleys and eight in vacant lots. All suggest a killer (or killers) adept at disposing of human remains without being observed.
6. Body recovery sites seem to fall in three broad areas: West Side, South Side and far South Side. There is a linear north-to-south aspect to the southern recovery sites, with eight sites near South Indiana Avenue. This suggests a mobile killer or killers with access to a motor vehicle and knowledge of Chicago streets.

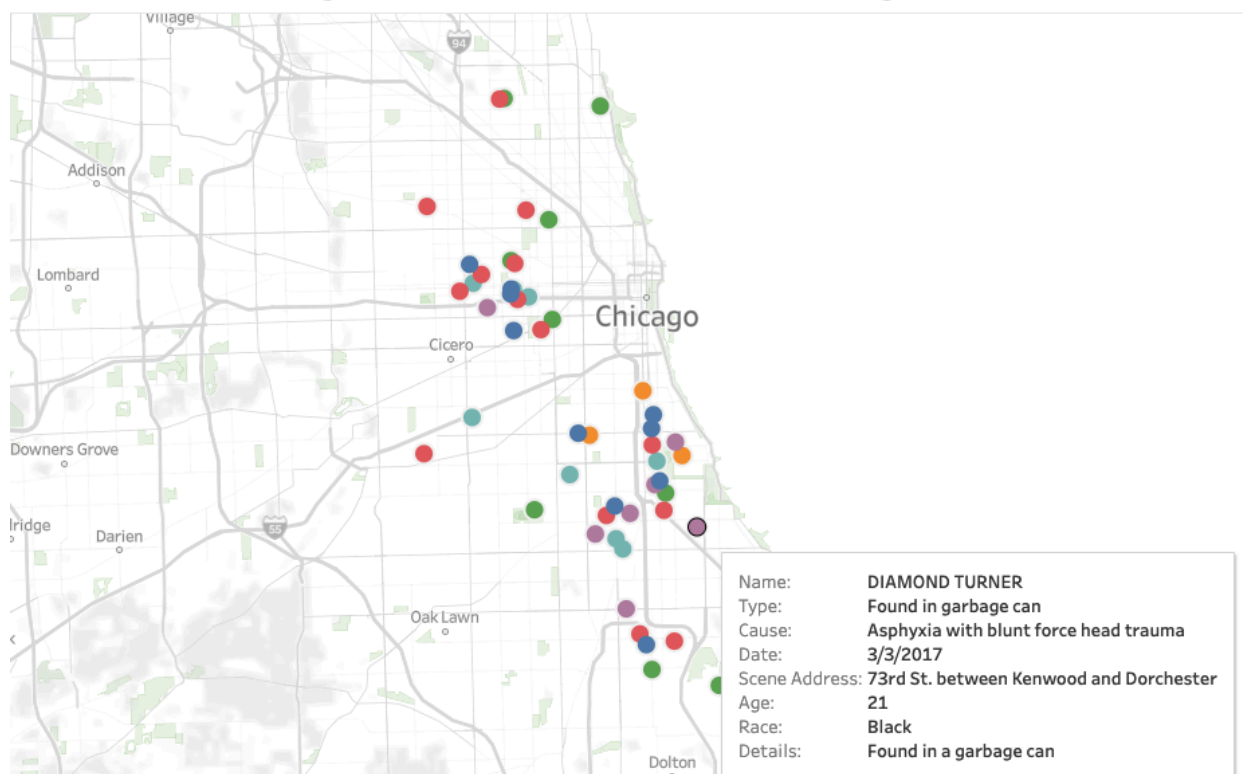
It should be noted that 39 of the victims (76 percent) were African American and 12 were Caucasian, although one of these was ethnically Hispanic. Victim race can be a useful indicator

of the probable race of serial offenders. (SHR data show that 87 percent of all cleared homicides involved killers and victims of the same race.) If the Chicago female strangulations are a series, as MAP believes, then the offender is most likely African American.

It should also be noted the age of these victims unexpectedly skews older than national norms. The youngest is 18, the oldest is 58 with a median age of 36. (The national median for female victims is 32.0) The average age of Chicago victims has increased over time, with the first 25 cases averaging 35.0 and the last 26 averaging 38.5. If this is a series, the killer was comfortable targeting older-than-average victims in the beginning and has picked even more senior victims as time has gone by and as he has aged.

At the request of WBBM journalists, MAP produced an interactive map showing the location of body recovery sites color coded to the nature of the site: trash cans, near abandoned buildings, alleys, vacant lots, etc. Here is this map:

## **Chicago's Unsolved Female Strangulations**



The interactive map can be accessed at:

<https://public.tableau.com/profile/thomas.hargrove#!/vizhome/ChicagoStrangulations/Strangulations>

The Murder Accountability Project's data and interactive displays are available at:

[www.murderdata.org](http://www.murderdata.org).

## Recommendations:

The Murder Accountability Project wholeheartedly endorses a course of action outlined by Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson who told WBBM: “We are looking at them (the 51 cases) now to see if we can go back and do some additional testing to see if that will help us bring to the forefront who these (offending) individuals are.”

These cases should be reviewed with special attention as to the completeness of DNA testing and completeness of their admission to DNA law enforcement databases like CODIS. MAP strongly recommends the backlog of DNA testing for samples obtained from victims of homicide (and sexual assault) be addressed. It is vital that all genetic clues be prosecuted.

MAP believes these cases should be reviewed with an assumption that some (or many) have common offender or offenders. Such a review may suggest key commonalities overlooked by the nearly universal problem of “linkage blindness” experienced by law enforcement when confronting an unrecognized serial killer. We also suggest that additional interviews with Chicago’s sex workers may reveal a person they believe is a suspect. Chicago may have witnesses who survived an encounter with the killer or killers.

MAP recommends the September 2018 death of Reo Renee Holyfield, whose body was found in a garbage container, be considered as part of the 51-case cluster. Holyfield's autopsy report indicated circumstances suggested "the death could have been homicide" by asphyxiation. But the Cook County Medical Examiner found that Holyfield's body was too decomposed to make a definite determination, so her cause of death was officially classified as "undetermined." Chicago Police, according to media reports, classified the case as a "suspended death investigation."

MAP also recommends consultation with the FBI and the Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP) in Quantico, Virginia. Other expertise may be available from Cook County Sheriff’s personnel and the Illinois State Police.

Finally, MAP notes that this pattern seemed to experience a hiatus in 2015 and 2016, suggesting the offender or offenders were incarcerated, out-of-town or otherwise unavailable.

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## Chicago's 51 Unsolved Female Strangulation/Asphyxiation Victims

<u>NAME</u>	<u>DOD</u>	<u>Crime Scene Type</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Race</u>
ANGELA MARIEANNA FORD	1/4/01	Found in abandoned building	32	Black
CHARLOTTE W. DAY	3/28/01	Found in vacant lot	42	Black
WINIFRED SHINES	8/2/01	Outdoors	33	Black
BRENDA COWART	8/22/01	Found in vacant lot	52	Black
ELAINE BONETA	11/5/01	Outdoors	41	Hispanic
SAUDIA BANKS	12/28/01	Indoors	39	Black
BESSIE SCOTT	2/16/02	Found in abandoned building	43	Black
GWENDOLYN WILLIAMS	6/12/02	Outdoors	44	Black
JODY GRISSOM	8/14/02	Found in alley	20	White
LORAIN HARRIS	8/25/02	Found in alley	36	White
DELLIE JONES	9/7/02	Found in abandoned building	33	Black
CELESTE JACKSON	12/20/02	Found in alley	37	Black
NANCY WALKER	3/19/03	Outdoors	55	Black
TARIKA JONES	5/20/03	Found in abandoned building	30	Black
LINDA GREEN	5/20/03	Found in alley	42	Black
ROSENDA BAROCIO	8/14/03	Found in alley	20	White
LaTONYA KEELER	8/16/03	Found in garbage can	29	Black
LATRICA HALL	10/15/03	Found in vacant lot	21	Black
LUCYSET (aka MARY) THOMAS	10/15/03	Found in abandoned building	38	Black
ETHEL AMERSON	12/26/03	Found in abandoned building	36	Black
MICHELLE DAVENPORT	7/15/04	Found in garbage can	40	Black
TAMALA EDWARDS	10/16/04	Found in alley	37	Black
MAKALAVAH WILLIAMS	11/5/04	Outdoors	18	Black
PRECIOUS SMITH	1/13/05	Found in alley	23	Black
DENISE V TORRES	2/1/05	Found in alley	35	White
WANDA HALL	8/30/05	Found in vacant lot	33	Black
YVETTE MASON	12/25/05	Found in alley	35	Black
SHANQUA WILLIAMS	12/30/05	Found in abandoned building	40	Black
MARGARET E. GOMEZ	1/12/06	Found in vacant lot	22	White
ANTOINETTE P. SIMMONS	7/14/06	Found in garbage can	21	Black
KELLY SARFF	9/24/06	Found in abandoned building	34	White
VERONICA FRAIZER	3/25/07	Found in alley	46	Black
MARY ANN SZATKOWSKI	5/2/07	Indoors	56	White
THERESA BUNN	11/13/07	Found in garbage can	21	Black
HAZEL MARION LEWIS	11/14/07	Found in garbage can	52	Black
GENEVIEVE MELLAS	10/9/08	Outdoors	32	White
CHARLENE MILLER	6/13/09	Indoors	54	Black
LaTOYA BANKS	7/5/09	Found in alley	29	Black
SHANNON WILLIAMS	8/6/09	Found in alley	36	Black
VANESSA RAJOKOVICH	12/9/09	Outdoors	32	White

LAFONDA SUE WILSON	6/25/10	Found in alley	43	Black
QUANDA L. CRIDER	7/16/10	Found in abandoned building	37	Black
ANGELA PROFIT	8/28/11	Found in vacant lot	46	Black
PAMELA WILSON	8/9/12	Found in vacant lot	30	Black
VELMA HOWARD	2/21/14	Found in alley	50	Black
DIAMOND TURNER	3/3/17	Found in garbage can	21	Black
CATHERINE SATERFIELD- BUCHANAN	6/22/17	Outdoors	58	Black
VALERIE MARIE JACKSON	3/17/18	Outdoors	49	Black
LORA DAWN HARBIN	5/25/18	Found in vacant lot	44	White
NICOLE LYNELL RIDGE	6/12/18	Found in abandoned building	47	White
REO RENEE HOLYFIELD	9/10/18	Found in garbage can	34	Black